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O'Donnell, Kenneth A.
O'Donnell International University
of Communications

WORLDWIDE TROUBLE-SHOOTER

Communications University Slated

Near Dulles

By WILLIAM DELANEY

Star Staff Writer

A vacant farmhouse near Dulles International Airport may soon become the hub of a globe-girdling "university of communications"—if a group of high-powered optimists can hitch some money to their dream.

The optimists, a varied lot including ex-New Frontiersman Kenneth P. O'Donnell, architect Buckminster Fuller and a titled British film magnate, are dreaming of a network of non-traditional graduate schools where communications will be studied as a tool toward solving the world's problems.

"Most of what occurs in the form of media is information or communication, but as far as problem-solving goes—well, too many times that's accidental or incidental," says Dr. Robert L. Hilliard, the former communications professor who has spearheaded the university project.

Individual Projects

"The potential of communications, for human good and progress," he says, "has only barely been tapped."

To tap this potential, founders of the International University of Communications envision an \$8.3-million headquarters campus at the Dulles site, specializing in such individual research projects as:

- o Helping health officials in Ghana or Los Angeles discover the most effective means of communicating with poor people to combat health problems in their areas.

- o Discovering means to reduce communications "gaps" within and among large institutions, such as government agencies, industries and unions.

- o Seeking new ideas on the nature of communications itself, and testing them in a project-oriented "school without walls" atmosphere free of traditional classes, lectures, grades and credits.

Though the free-wheeling concept of such a university has been spinning around for several years in the minds of its principal sparkplugs—Hilliard on the academic side and Dorothy H. Davies on

organizational—only last month, with the gift of the 25-acre campus site, did the project reach the public announcement stage.

Later this month, the university's far-flung board of advisers is to meet in Washington to approve a fund-raising plan which, Mrs. Davies hopes, will put the university into operation in the refurbished Loudoun County farmhouse within a year.

In addition to the eventual \$8.3 million headquarters campus with its 300 to 400 students, the university founders foresee electronically linked branch campuses ultimately being established in the United States and abroad. (Now in the planning stage, for example, are regional centers in St. Louis and Tokyo.)

Chartered 2 Years Ago

The university was chartered in Washington two years ago this week with Hilliard as president and Mrs. Davies as secretary-treasurer. Hilliard is employed as chief of educational broadcasting for the Federal Communications Commission, and Mrs. Davies is Washington office manager for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Both stress that their jobs are strictly separate from their after-hours work on the university.

Having tested the university idea with foreign embassies ("They gave us unanimous encouragement and support," says Mrs. Davies) and with highly placed friends in education, government and industry, in the past two years the pair began lining up a board that includes:

- Yoshinori Maeda, president of NIKK, the Japan Broadcasting Corp.; William Friday, president of the University of North Carolina; Frederick O'Neal, president of Actors Equity Association; Britain's Edward Henry Lord Willis, president of World Wide Pictures; Kansas newspaper publisher John Montgomery; Elizabeth Duncan Koontz, director of the U. S. Women's Bureau; Jack T. Conway, former aide to the late United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther;

and now head of the Washington-based Center for Community Change.

Whitney Young, the late head of the National Urban League, also was "very involved" as a board member, according to O'Donnell.

O'Donnell, who was special assistant to President John F. Kennedy while Mrs. Davies was a White House staff assistant for special projects, is a board member and enthusiastic backer of the project.

"When I was in the White House, the biggest problem all of us had was in communicating internationally," says O'Donnell, who now runs a management consulting firm in the Boston area.

Both he and Hilliard emphasize that the university board, like the envisioned institution, is politically nonpartisan.

Major Study Area

Hilliard, who has written several textbooks on communications and formerly taught at Brooklyn College, Adelphi College and the University of North Carolina, says the communications university will initially offer programs enabling a student to earn a master's or arts degree in roughly a two-year period.

The student would pick a major study area (international communications, rural communications, etc.), within which he would study the relationship between a specific media (television, computers, etc.) and a field such as politics, economics or regional studies (Asia, Africa, Latin America, etc.).

Working in turn in the university's learning, research and resource centers, the student would then be expected to carry out three problem-solving research projects to earn his degree.

The tutor-type professors supervising this work will be "the best available people," Hilliard promises, regardless of whether they have formal academic credentials.

And the university facilities

multi-media study booths, a television studio, a printing plant, a theater, art studios and other arenas where students can try out their problem-solving media projects.

Student Breakdown

Hilliard estimates that half the students will be foreign, another large portion sent by American government agencies, industries and other institutions, and a third sizable group just out of college.

Such "communicators" as consumer advocates, welfare mothers and leaders of black and Mexican-American communities would also be invited to attend as fellowship students, according to Hilliard's plans.

No tuition figure has been decided upon, though Mrs. Davies recalls the figure of \$1,500 being bandied about two inflation-filled years ago.

With the donation of the Dulles site by developer Francis J. Finneran (valued at an estimated \$150,000 to \$250,000) and \$10,000 in gifts (including a \$7,500 development grant from International Business Machines Corp.), Mrs. Davies—working out of the university's small leased office in a Dupont Circle building—is confident that "the time is ripe" for attracting money to the dream, "so great is the need" for a communications university.

"The important thing at this point," she says, "is to make it known that the university does exist...."